



Reducing Racial Disparities in Health Outcomes: Prenatal Care and Infant Mortality

Public Health Problem

African American, American Indian, and Puerto Rican infants have higher death rates than white infants. In 1999, the infant mortality ratio was 2.5 times higher among black infants than among white infants (up from 2.4 in 1998). This widening disparity between black and white infants is a trend that has persisted over the last two decades, and the Michigan infant mortality rate continues to be higher than the national rate. For every 1,000 Michigan live births, approximately 8 infants die before reaching their first birthday.

Evidence That Prevention Works

Women who receive prenatal care in the first trimester have better pregnancy outcomes than women who receive little or no prenatal care. For example, the likelihood of delivering a very low-birth-weight (VLBW) infant (one weighing less than 1,500 grams or 3 lbs. 4 oz.) is 40% higher among women who receive late or no prenatal care compared with women entering prenatal care in the first trimester. Approximately 95% of VLBW infants are born preterm (after less than 37 weeks of gestation), and the risk of early death for VLBW infants is about 65 times that of infants who weigh at least 1,500 grams.

Program Example

Supported by CDC's REACH 2010 program, the Genesee County Precious Black Babies Project is a Flint-area collaboration that emphasizes reducing racial disparities in health outcomes with a particular focus on infant mortality through population and systematic interventions that embody cultural understanding, sensitivity, and relevance. Through the project, health communications professionals created a campaign to raise awareness among community residents about racial disparities in infant death rates and to educate these residents on how to reduce disparities in infant mortality. Through the project and a faith-based health network, community events were sponsored to provide a forum to disseminate information about reducing African American infant mortality rates. Over 150 people, including city officials, local vendors, and nurses, attended the rally. Four workshops were also held to engage the community about the issue of race and access to health care and discuss strategies to address the problem.

Implications

Community-based programs like the Genesee County Precious Black Babies Project that seek community input are more likely than other programs to address the needs and the culture of the community. This community-based approach can extend lifesaving prevention programs and health services across cultures to reach communities that would not likely be reached by traditional means.